DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 036 IR 051 513

AUTHOR	Boorstin, Daniel J.
TITLE	The Indivisible World. Libraries and the Myth of Cultural Exchange. The Center for the Book Viewpoint Series No. 15.
INSTITUTION	Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Center for the Book.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-8444-0519-1
PUB DATE	19 Aug 85
NOTE	14p.; Paper presented at the General Conference of the International Federation of Library Associations (Chicago, IL, August 19, 1985).
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Censorship; *Cultural Exchange; Global Approach; *International Cooperation; *Libraries; Library Role; Library Standards; *National Libraries; Position Papers; Program Descriptions
IDENTIFIERS	*International Librarianship; *Library of Congress

ABSTRACT

These remarks suggest that, although the world's cultures--and the culture of books--may be defined by languages, by traditions, and by historical movements, they are not confined by national boundaries: all boundaries in the world of culture and ideas are artificial and all are doomed to be dissolved. Since all culture belongs to all people, books and ideas create a boundless world, and librarians of the world are servants of an indivisible world. To keep that world indivisible is the most urgent and most difficult task for librarians. Political, economic, or military chauvinists who would like to make libraries narrowly national, and ideologues who try to sanitize the books that are published, are the enemies and saboteurs of the work of the world's librarians. The Library of Congress (LC) is attempting to serve an indivisible world of culture and books and ideas: only about one-quarter of the library's books are in English, while three-quarters are in the other languages of the world. In collecting and preserving other cultural objects--photographs, graphic art, motion pictures, music, and maps, LC tries to display the full spectrum of the cultures of mankind. Despite the cost and time-consuming nature of this effort, LC does not allow itself to be confined by the cultures of Europe and the West. (THC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED269036

The Indivisible World

Libraries and the Myth of Cultural Exchange

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OERI
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official position or policy.

Daniel J. Boorstin, The Librarian of Congress

REMARKS AT THE IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE
CHICAGO, AUGUST 19, 1985

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS · WASHINGTON
MCMLXXXV

IR051513

The Center for the Book
Viewpoint Series
No. 15

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Boorstin, Daniel J. (Daniel Joseph), 1914–
The indivisible world.

(The Center for the Book viewpoint series ; no. 15)
"Remarks at the IFLA General Conference, August 19, 1985."
1. International librarianship—Addresses, essays, lectures. 2. Cultural relations—Addresses, essays, lectures. 3. Exchanges, Literary and scientific—Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Title. II. Series: Center for the Book viewpoint series ; 15.
Z672.B635 1985 021.6'4 85–600295
ISBN 0–8444–0519–1

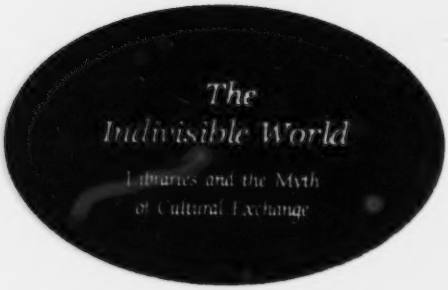
The paper used in this publication meets the requirements for permanence established by the American National Standard for Information Sciences "Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials," ANSI Z39.48-1984.

THE CENTER FOR THE BOOK in the Library of Congress is pleased to present the remarks Librarian of Congress Daniel J. Boorstin made at the Chicago conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) on August 19, 1985. The indivisible world of books and ideas is the principal concern of the Center for the Book, which was established by law in 1977 to stimulate public interest in books and reading and to encourage the study of books. The center's program is supported by tax-deductible contributions from individuals and corporations. Previous publications dealing with international topics include The International Flow of Information: A Trans-Pacific Perspective *(1981) and* U.S. Books Abroad: Neglected Ambassadors *(1984). Further information is available from the Center for the Book, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540.*

Over fifteen hundred individuals representing eighty-four countries gathered in Chicago for the fifty-first general conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Established in 1927, IFLA is an independent, nongovernmental association that promotes international understanding and cooperation in all fields of library activity. Its membership consists of library associations and institutions from throughout the world. The Chicago conference was the first convened in the United States since 1974, when the delegates met in Washington, D.C.

JOHN Y. COLE
Executive Director
The Center for the Book

4



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IN THIS TIME OF political hostilities, military threats, trade barriers, and technological rivalry and secrecy, we must not forget some of the unique features of cultural relations among nations, and the role of libraries, especially of books.

In recent decades we have heard a great deal about so-called Cultural Exchange. Many countries have their cultural foreign service. We have our United States Information Service, the British have their British Council, the French have their Alliance Française, the West Germans have their Goethe Houses, and the Soviet Union has its counterpart. Nowadays embassies have their "cultural attachés"—an expression which entered the English language only in 1937. "Cultural Exchange" has entered the jargon of international relations. And there is not a great deal of difference between the kinds of activities of the countries, however diverse their political or economic philosophies. They send lecturers, musicians, orchestras, dance-groups, and dramatic performers. They all distribute books and maintain libraries. Of course, we librarians have been in the business of international cultural relations for at least two thousand years—ever since Callimachus

went to Alexandria to build the famous library's collection, and produced his 120-volume catalog of the holdings in Greek literature.

Nowadays our thinking about these thriving and costly international cultural transactions is governed by some seductive metaphors. These metaphors are borrowed from politics, economics, and military affairs. From politics come the notions of leadership, domination, and compromise, of annexation and national boundaries. From economics come the notions of competition, balance of trade (imports and exports), and reciprocity. From the military come the notions of invasion, conquest, advance and retreat. These all express and foster ways of thinking which, in my opinion, are inappropriate to the world of culture, and especially to the world of books and ideas. They corrupt our thought and distract us from our proper mission as librarians to the world.

All these crudities are expressed in the single notion of Cultural Exchange. As a member of several official commissions on cultural relations between the United States and other countries, I have often met this notion. I have heard intelligent people debate the "reciprocity" of cultural exports and imports. Since so many American movies are exported and shown in India, then, in order to promote cordial relations and a sense of the equality of peoples, must not an equivalent number of movies be imported to the United States from India? May it not be an indignity to the people of India if they send many of their works of sculpture to be exhibited in the United States, unless equivalent works from the United States are simultaneously sent for exhibit in India? And what does it show of the Indian people's respect for the United States

if what they wish from our great museums are not an equivalent number of works by Americans, but works from our European, Asian, and African collections? Similar debates concerning our relations with other countries go on all the time. In my opinion these are exercises in futility, efforts to compare the incomparable, to measure incommensurables.

This language of cultural equivalents violates the unique character of works of art. It prevents us from recognizing the capacity of all peoples to produce their own kind of uniqueness. In contrast with the commodities of commercial exchange, significant works of art are not quantifiable. Only trivial and evanescent works—pulp music and pulp novels—can be numbered. But how many paintings by Jamini Roy equal how many Jackson Pollocks? How many Hiroshige prints equal how many Whistler etchings?

We know, too, that while we can make useful projections of the gross national product or the output of mines and factories, nothing like that is possible in the realm of the arts. The artist and his works are unpredictable.

Furthermore, we know that, unlike commodities of the marketplace, books and works of art are cumulative and not displacive. If we buy a Honda or a Mercedes we are not apt to buy a Chevrolet or a Cadillac. But if we play Copland or Bartok we do not cease playing Mozart or Beethoven. Reading Virgil enriches our pleasure in Homer. Works of art and literature are iridescent, they take on new meanings from new points of view and in new conditions of our world. Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dostoyevsky tell each generation something new. The uses

of an automobile, a camera, or a television set are more fixed and more predictable. A work of art or of literature—a Brueghel or a Van Gogh—a Paradise Lost or a Moby Dick—is great precisely because it is unique and incommensurable. We cannot know what they may mean to a future generation.

Now, when we turn from the art products of a culture to its ideas, all these elusivenesses are multiplied. The air is never empty of ideas. The atmosphere of our society—of any society—is not a vacuum into which a government or a minister of culture can pour a desired content. It is a copious fertile ether, and, like the Chinese *ch'i*, an inexhaustible source of energy and creation that is found everywhere.

Again, in dramatic contrast to the world of exchangeable commodities, ideas and knowledge are nondepletable. They are indefinitely, even infinitely, expandable. The ideas of idealism or materialism flourish because more people accept them. In fact knowledge increases by diffusion. No patent or copyright—nor any device of government yet contrived—can prevent people from having an idea, from enjoying it, elaborating it, and passing it on to countless others. And there is no precise equivalence among ideas. Ideas are not fungible. One idea cannot take exactly the same place that was held by another.

Like works of art and literature, *ideas* too are cumulative and not displacive. Japanese steel may displace American-made steel from our factories, and a Volvo can displace an Oldsmobile on our roads. But the ideas in Marx's *Das Kapital* built on the ideas in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and some think that Marx gave Smith's

ideas a new urgency and a new vogue. The ideas have never yet been invented which can drive Plato's ideas out of circulation. Nor are ideas quantifiable. Despite the expectations of professors grading examination papers, can we really say how many ideas there are in Aristotle's *Politics*, or how many ideas have derived from them? Ideas—innumerable, and boundless—are unimaginably fertile.

From these familiar features of art and books and ideas, it must be evident, too, that culture has an inertia, a momentum, and a spontaneity not encompassed in the borrowed jargon of cultural exchange. A book is a uniquely explosive device. But ideas, unlike people, do not exterminate one another. There never was an idea that could not be revived and given new life. Ideas may seem to compete, but no one ever finally wins that competition. So long as people live and think, there will never be an enduring monopoly by any idea. We need no antitrust laws in the world of ideas. The diffusion of any idea—democracy or communism, for example—in the long run will increase man's desire to know other ideas. No government can permanently stultify this appetite.

The boundaries and divisions of nations and states and cities are needed for social services, for water and sewage, for protection of property and the administration of justice. But the cultural world—the world of books and ideas—is indivisible. The barriers needed to direct traffic, to prevent crime, to control drugs, or to promote the domestic economy—these too have no place in the librarians' world. How impoverished would our knowledge and our culture be, if we had access only to books

first written in our national language by our fellow nationals!

The world's cultures—and the culture of books—may be defined by languages, by traditions, by historical movements. But they are not confined by national boundaries. Ideas need no passports from their place of origin, nor visas for the countries they enter. All boundaries in the world of culture and ideas are artificial and all are doomed to be dissolved.

We, the librarians of the world, are servants of an indivisible world. Though some of us are national librarians, culture is not national. All culture belongs to all people. Books and ideas make a boundless world. To try to confine the reading or the thinking of any people violates the very nature of culture.

To keep that world indivisible is our most urgent, our most difficult task. Chauvinists—political, economic, or military—would make our libraries narrowly national. And ideologues, claiming the final answer to our finally unanswerable questions, try to sanitize the books that are published, and seek to sterilize the contents of our libraries. These are enemies and saboteurs of our work as the world's librarians.

At the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., we make an effort to serve an indivisible world of culture and books and ideas. Only about one-quarter of the books on our shelves are in English, the primary language of our country, while three-quarters are in the other languages of our immigrant nation and of the world. More than half our entries are in non-Roman alphabet, including extensive collections in the Slavic languages, Chinese, Japanese, and languages of India and Southeast Asia and

Africa. In collecting and preserving other cultural objects—photographs, graphic art, motion pictures, music, and maps—we also try to display the full spectrum of the cultures of mankind. Although the effort is costly and time-consuming, we do our best not to allow ourselves to be confined by the cultures of Europe and the West.

Everywhere our efforts to keep the world of culture and of ideas indivisible face obstacles. Even in the United States we see occasional efforts to censor libraries and confine the reading of our citizens to what some lawmakers or self-appointed arbiters of morals consider wholesome. Luckily, until now, these have been few and have carried little weight. Other countries are not so lucky. In much, perhaps even most of the world today, people are not free to read whatever they like, or whatever the world can send them.

We are pleased to learn that, for example, in the Lenin Library in Moscow more than one-third of the books are in languages other than Russian. But, at the same time, all librarians must be saddened that a new Russian word recently entered our desk dictionaries: "*samizdat* . . . The secret publication and distribution of government-banned literature in the U.S.S.R. . . . The literature produced by this system." How happy we could be someday to see this word disappear from our dictionaries and to learn that the word had become obsolete!

In a world divided by ideology, by trade barriers, by military threats and nuclear fear, we librarians are not powerless. We are the ambassadors of an indivisible world—of culture and books and ideas. Unfortunately, we are not plenipotentiary. But there is no country in the world where librarians, encouraged by a national li-

brarian, cannot make some small progress toward removing the boundaries and lowering the barriers which separate cultures and which are sponsored by citizens or by governments. Every librarian, regardless of his government's policy, has the opportunity, if he has the courage, to open the avenues of books and ideas a little wider.

For librarians there can be no unwholesome ideas or banned books—only unwholesome efforts to limit ideas and stultify the whole world of books. Until every reader in the world has free access to any books from anywhere we librarians have not completed our task. "Librarians of the World, Unite!" We can hope and must try everywhere to make the world of books more open—so that men and women everywhere may breathe freely the uncensored open air of ideas.

THIS BOOKLET was designed by James E. Conner and printed by offset lithography at Garamond Pridemark Press in Baltimore, Maryland. The typefaces, created by Hermann Zapf, are ITC-Zapf International and ITC-Zapf Chancery set by Monotype Composition Company Inc., in Baltimore. The paper is 80-lb Mohawk Superfine Text.